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ABSTRACT

Educators and legislators tend to have differing impressions of the definition of educational quality. Components of quality can be classified into three categories: (1) input, e.g., student characteristics, such as grade point average and test scores, and faculty characteristics, such as advanced degrees and publications; (2) environment/process, e.g., library resources, student/faculty ratios, and state appropriations; and (3) outcomes, e.g., graduate placement and achievement, number of graduates, and honors. While legislators tend to focus on aspects of quality that are outcome indicators, educators tend to emphasize input and process quality indicators. These conceptual differences are related to other differences, such as the educator's desire for job security and a good salary and the legislator's desire for re-election. A corrective action plan for community college educators based on the differences between themselves and legislators would involve developing an understanding of public opinion and central legislative issues; designing public information programs around the public, rather than the academic, perspective; recognizing the political reality of the legislator; and learning the art of compromise. (LAL)

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DIFFERENCES AND IMPLICATIONS OF LEGISLATOR AND EDUCATOR PERCEPTIONS OF QUALITY EDUCATION

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Presented at the 54th Annual Convention of the CALIFORNIA ASSOCIATION OF COMMUNITY COLLEGES, Sacramento, California, November 18-20, 1983.

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CALIFORNIA ASSOCIATION OF COMMUNITY COLLEGES
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"Differences and Implications of Legislator and Educator Perceptions of Quality Education"

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Introduction

Not too many years ago, it was generally held that educators should not become involved with legislatures. This view was based on a historic declaration that education was above politics. Some of the academics even advanced the proposition that academic freedom was the cornerstone of this declaration.

Few educators today would defend that earlier view. Educators representing either public or private institutions now see the reality of day-to-day involvement in the legislative process and recognize the fact that the future condition of institutions will be determined to a great extent by actions of the legislature. It behooves us, therefore, to learn more about how legislators think and particularly how they view education issues.

I will be reporting on several studies carried out at Florida State University which were initiated as a result of concern over educational quality during the past few years. Our Legislature has instituted several programs intended to improve quality or to force institutions toward quality goals. Obviously, the problem is one of definition. What is meant by the word "quality" and by whose definition should decisions and

priorities be made? To investigate this, an attempt was made to identify components of quality as revealed in the literature and against which legislators and educators could reveal their interpretation. These components could be classified within three basic categories including: (1)Input, (2)Environment (process), and (3)Outcome. The Input category of quality typically is what the student or faculty member brings to the college, including ability, motivation, prior knowledge, and similar background characteristics. The Environment or process category of quality is reflected in the educational programs, in support resources, and approaches or methodology. The third category of Outcome deals with changes in the student such as successful transfer or job placement or cognitive and non-cognitive outcomes as reflected in grades, honors, or achievements.

Dr. David V. Pavesic, a member of the faculty at Florida State, did his dissertation on a perceptional study on the importance of components of quality in higher education in Florida. Another doctoral student, David Krause, dealt with another aspect of the same problem. They searched the literature for components of quality which were identified and then placed them into one of the three categories just described.

Input: Input quality indicators are such things as student characteristics including grade point average, SAT scores, valedictorian and related honors, as well as advanced placement classifications. Faculty input indicators include advanced degrees earned, reputation of institution from which graduated, awards and achievements, publications, and professional

memberships.

Environment (Process): The quality indicators associated with the environment include library resources, low student-faculty ratio, state appropriations per student, course breadth and depth, institutional goals and objectives, selective admissions, student fellowships/scholarships, and faculty development.

Outcomes: The outcomes quality indicators include placement and achievement of graduates, number of graduates, honors, comparative analysis of students/graduates with similar programs in state and region, and high grade point averages.

The literature on quality indicators has grown over the past ten years. Astin (1979) sought to identify three realms of indicators associated with environment including human environment, physical environment, and psychological environment. NCHEMS (the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems) (1977) carried out a study of institutional administrators and state-level decision makers on educational quality outcomes in which community impact, community educational development, and community service were added to the typical student graduate and student achievement indicators. Allen Cartter (1966) is well known for the quality assessment studies in graduate education and the National Association of College and University of Business Officers (NACUBO) has even carried out studies intended to relate quality to cost factors in higher education. The conclusion of the NACUBO 1975 study was: "While there may be a relationship between cost and quality, it is not

appropriate to measure quality by using cost information.... it is inappropriate... to assume that the higher the cost of a particular program the higher the quality; or the lower the cost of a program, the greater its efficiency."

Quality Definitional Differences: Regardless of the taxonomy or typology used to evaluate quality in higher education, there remains a distinct difference in the perception of legislators and educators. Legislators consistently identify quality indicators which are OUTCOME indicators. Educators consistently select Input and Environmental quality indicators. Legislators understandably are attracted by evidences of winning, numerical growth evidences, public acceptance, and the spotlight. A winning football team or basketball team can create a belief on the part of a legislator that quality is present. Numerical evidences of growth can be reflected in the numbers of students who graduated from one year to another or in the numbers of students who are successfully placed in jobs or who successfully transfer to upper division institutions. The loyalty of the public in declaring the uniqueness or quality of its institution can often be translated into an image of quality on the part of the legislator.

Educators, in sharp contrast, tend to identify the input and environmental quality measures such as advanced degrees earned, professional recognition, student-faculty ratio, salary levels, and library support. Student success is identified but typical within the types of recognition academe has glamorized such as honors, grade point average, and scores on national test batteries.

Conceptual Differences

The verified difference in quality indicators between legislators and educators is a symptom rather than the problem. It is necessary, therefore, for us to examine some of the conceptual differences that exist.

First, educators tend to have a single dimensional perspective while legislators have a multiple perspective. Legislators view education as only one of many social services. Significantly, the importance and value of the various social services is constantly changing whereby the high priorities can be unemployment and crime at one time but shift to taxation and economic development at another time. Transportation can and does rank higher than the value of education at one time or another in the eyes of the legislator. Right now in California, you can clearly see several social services which rank higher than education in importance in the eyes of your legislature.

Educators believe that education is always the most important if not the only social service about which the legislature should be concerned. I could go on and on in illustrating this perceptional difference. However, there is another more fundamental difference which should be understood.

While serving as Assistant Commissioner for Higher Education in Pennsylvania in the 1960s, I was always fascinated to observe the miscommunication taking place between college and university presidents offering testimony before the Education and **Appropriation** Committees of the Pennsylvania Legislature. Eric **Walker**, former President of Penn State University, would testify

about the importance of higher education and the critical need for the Legislature to appropriate monies which would serve the interests of the people in the Commonwealth. The late Clyde Blocker, the then President of the Harrisburg Area Community College, would also give testimony on the importance of higher education for the Commonwealth and the need for more appropriations. The legislators, on the other hand, were also calling for better higher education opportunity for the citizens and the Commonwealth. On the surface it appeared that both parties were talking about the same thing; however, through one-on-one discussion, it became clear that the legislators and the educators were miles apart. While Eric Walker and Clyde Blocker the importance of higher education, they were actually meaning the importance of Penn State University or the importance of the community college... that is, they were speaking from an institutional or structural perspective. The legislators, on the other hand, were speaking from a social service perspective and were not interested in the institutional structure. I watched this conceptual difference take place over and over again whether at the postsecondary level or at the school district level. School superintendents as well as college and university presidents often spoke of local control which actually meant "my institution" not the broad concept of local control which was in the minds of the legislators.

Root Purposes

Now, I should like to deal with the root differences between legislators and educators which are built into the differences in

the basic purposes of each. I am sure some of you will be displeased by this analysis and others will disclaim it. Nevertheless, any serious contemplation will reveal the fact that these apparent differences actually are only in focus. The undergirding cause is the same.

Legislator: The root or basic purpose of the legislator is to be re-elected! To do this, the legislator responds to the expectations or demands of the public. Furthermore, the legislator recognizes the value of garnering power within the party as well as within government itself. This power comes as a result of mastering the art of compromise. At the same time, power in our society is symbolicly associated with winning, growing, the spotlight, and public acceptance. These, in turn, are those quality indicators we discussed a few moments ago in contrasting the definitional differences.

Educator: While many of you will disagree with this declaration, the root goal or purpose of the educator is job security and a good salary. In reality, it is synonymous with the re-election goal of the legislator. If you don't believe me, interview those educators who either have suffered the reality of retrenchment or who have been identified as next in line for such retrenchment. For example, how often have you heard faculty members argue that the heavy teaching load is detrimental to quality instruction only to have them accept an overload teaching assignment evenings for the extra stipend? Our quest for job security and a good salary are the reason that Input and Environment quality indicators more typically are identified. Degrees earned, professional recognition, and support resources

are all relevant to our quest.

The CACC Study

With these concepts in mind, let us examine the highlights of the CACC Study carried out by Larry Eastland and Associates this year on perceptions of your registered voters. The economy, unemployment, taxes, and crime were areas of concern as well as education. In fact, the economy and unemployment were more important than education. Concerns related to education scored less than half as high as concerns for unemployment and your state budget.

Now, let us look at a very strategic fact associated with the public's concern for unemployment. According to your study, "Twice as many respondents (34.5%) saw no chance 'AT ALL' of re-employment in their original profession or with their former employer as opposed to 17% who saw it as 'very likely' for unemployed persons living in their households." If we go back to the root purposes observation that we educators are concerned with job security, we certainly ought to be able to appreciate the emotional impact on those unemployed who see no chance of re-employment in their original field. You can be sure that their plight shall be high in the minds of the California Legislature.

Your CACC Study also found that two-thirds of the respondents saw community college education as a "possibility" for acquiring new job skills while only one-third saw this as the "most likely" possibility. It was interesting how the author of the report attempted to create good news out of this statement. Here is the direct quotation: "Community college education to

acquire new job skills in order to gain employment was viewed as a possibility by two-thirds of these respondents, and was viewed by one-third as the most likely possiblity." Ladies and Gentlemen, I would submit that this is indicative of educators trying to paint a positive picture and losing sight of the potential for corrective action. I shall attempt to clarify this after identifying several highlights of the CACC Study. Among the conclusions reported were: "Three-fourths of the respondents who attended a California community college enrolled in courses related to employment or preparation for transfer." Another finding was: " Two-thirds of the respondents who attended the California community college indicated it was 'important' to them to receive academic credit for courses in which they enrolled". Yet another highlight identified was "Over four-fifths of the respondents indicated there should be more local control over their community colleges".

Now, let us consider an action plan based on the differences between legislators and educators.

Corrective Action

Step 1: Know the public position and the central issues

Sharp differences between legislator and educator perception of quality need to be understood. At the same time, the similarity in the root purposes or goals of the two make legislators and educators more alike than different. Therefore, the first critical step is for us as educators to take advantage of how legislators think. We know that they will respond to public pressure or to those forces which can enhance political power.

Using the results of the CACC Study, it is obvious that community colleges need to create a public understanding and view that California community colleges are the strategic social service for solving the problem of unemployment. Furthermore, community colleges should be seen as the key for re-employment wherever education or training is involved.

In the same vein, the strategic role of community colleges in economic development and in addressing the taxation problems of the state can be the basis for a community college system-wide strategy and action plan. Unfortunately, as an outsider, it would appear to me that your community colleges in California are presently seen as part of the problem rather than the solution. From newspaper accounts and interpretations of some community college folks here in California, I have been led to interpret the dilemma as the inability of the community college system to get its act together. The Governor's veto and the issue of funding may well have been a partisan conflict between the executive and legislative branches. The absence of a unified position on the part of the community colleges, however, apparently resulted in part of the unfortunate consequences rather than any initiatives which could have benefitted the system.

Step 2. Design public information programs around the public perspective, not the perspective of academe.

Any content analysis of the releases of individual community colleges or even of the system itself will reveal that most items are written from the perspective of academe. I attempted to illustrate that earlier in the quote from the CACC Study. Here's

another one: "Of the total sample, almost 80% rated the quality of education offered at a California community college as excellent to average when considered in conjunction with the UC and CSU systems." Neither the public nor the legislature are stupid. They will want to know what percentage actually rated it as excellent and what portion average. This is a statement written from the perspective of academe and not the public perspective.

Step 3. Recognize the political reality of the legislator.

As observed earlier, there is a natural quest for power on the part of the legislator. Political leadership is critical to future ambitions as well as to the root purpose of being re-elected. Therefore, education is going to find itself caught from time to time in the struggles that take place for political leadership. It needs to understand this reality and be prepared to take whatever corrective action possible or at least take that action which will mitigate against major consequences.

Legislators generally think on a long-term basis when it comes to addressing the requirements of the competing social services. We in education expect a "quick fix" and thus more often than not are short-term thinkers on issues involving the legislature. Community colleges in California should be working on the agenda for 1985 and '86 right now. If you are like educators in other states, you are probably thinking of the 1984 session only.

Legislators seek solutions, for such are strategic to public approval and thereby re-election. Community colleges need to

avoid being seen as the problem. Community college leadership should remember the Japanese adage that a problem represents a challenge or opportunity. It is absolutely possible to paint a picture of solution for most of the problems confronting the public since education is so strategic in our contemporary society and community colleges are so uniquely appropriate as the delivery system.

Step 4. Learn Art of Compromise

Finally, I would suggest that we in education must learn the difference between our tendency toward the art of consensus and the political reality involving the art of compromise. While we may believe that it is obvious that education should be high in the priorities of the legislature, neither the public nor the legislators are going to see it that way. We must learn to win some and lose some. We must learn to work outside the field of education through alliances and coalitions. We must understand that we are in competition not only with other social services but with the other educational delivery systems as well.

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